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During the searing summer months in Scottsdale, many of the customers at Desert Wolf Tours are foreign visitors.

Tourists from Germany, Spain, France and other countries don't mind the heat and love the hotel bargains. And they budget for activities such as the company's \$145 half-day guided tour in the Bradshaw Mountains.

Co-owner Zev Nadler and other owners of tourism-dependent businesses hope a major new public-private partnership to market the United States abroad will lure more foreign vacationers to Arizona in the summer and year-round.

"I think it's a good thing," Nadler said. "I'm hoping there will be an impact come next season."

The bipartisan Travel Promotion Act, given final approval by the U.S. Senate this week and expected to be signed by the president, funds increased efforts to promote U.S. travel destinations to tourists from other nations.

An independent, non-profit Corporation for Travel Promotion will be created and run by a panel of international travel-marketing experts. It will be funded by a new \$10 fee on foreign travelers who do not already pay visa fees and by contributions from large travel businesses such as Disney.

The legislation is aimed at helping the United States better compete against other countries for vacationers and to help revive the recession-battered travel industry in Arizona and the rest of the nation. Metro Phoenix was one of the worst-performing hotel markets in the country in 2009.

Pushed by lawmakers from big tourist states, including Arizona, California, Nevada, and Florida, the Travel Promotion Act also will educate foreign travelers about U.S. security and

entry regulations to make them seem less daunting.

Studies have shown that international travelers worry that entering the United States will be difficult and time-consuming because of the security measures put in place after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

International travel to the United States fell more than 9 percent from 2000 to 2009, according to the U.S. Travel Association. That resulted in an estimated loss to the U.S. travel industry of more than \$500 billion in revenue and more than 440,000 jobs.

Tourism is big business in Arizona, home to the Grand Canyon, world-class resorts and golf and, in much of the state, weather that's the envy of the nation the bulk of the year.

In 2008, the latest year for which figures are available, the state attracted more than 37 million overnight visitors who spent \$18.5 billion, according to the Arizona Office of Tourism. They directly and indirectly support 310,400 jobs.

"Tourism is an essential lifeblood of Arizona's economy," said Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., who co-sponsored the bill in the House. "By promoting travel to vacation and convention destinations like Phoenix and Scottsdale, this bill will provide a much-needed boost for our tourism industry and to the thousands of jobs it supports."

There are about 160,000 tourism jobs in the Phoenix area alone, said Steve Moore, president and CEO of the Greater Phoenix Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"The Travel Promotion Act is a significant step in the right direction for our national and local economies," Moore said. "This new program will bring critical international tourist dollars to our hotels, attractions, restaurants and transportation providers."

Michael Hoffmann, managing director of the Boulders Resort in Scottsdale, said the new

advertising and market will support existing international promotion efforts by individual hotels and chains. The Boulders and the Arizona Biltmore are part of the Hilton chain, which has a London sales office covering Europe.

"I think there's tremendous upside, eventually, if we do this right," Hoffmann said.

The new international tourism promotion comes at a time of proposed deep budget cuts at the Arizona Office of Tourism.

"The timing of this is wonderful because now, there is a national fund being established," said Greg Miller, vice president and managing director of Destination Hotels and Resorts, which manages the Royal Palms Resort, Tempe Mission Palms and the Wigwam Resort.

Despite support from the local tourism industry, Arizona Sens. John McCain and Jon Kyl, both Republicans, voted against the bill. The legislation passed 78-18 with bipartisan support.

Brooke Buchanan, McCain's spokeswoman, said the two senators spoke to each other before the vote and agreed that the bill would create more government bureaucracy, which they did not want to do.

"We should be reducing bureaucracy, not making it bigger," she said.

She said the senators also thought it was unfair to impose a tax on foreign tourists.

"If we're trying to increase tourism to the United States, I don't believe a new tax would be an added incentive," she said.

Oxford Economics, a private consulting firm, estimates the program could attract 1.6 million

new international visitors to the United States and generate \$321 million in new federal tax revenue each year. The U.S. Travel Association estimates the program would create nearly 40,000 jobs nationwide in the first year.

In Arizona, international visitors represent just a small fraction of overall visitors, totaling 5 million in 2008. Three out of four of them were from Mexico.

Hoffmann said that is in line with the percentage of international visitors at the Boulders, a high-end resort. They are coveted by resorts and other visitor-dependent businesses because they tend to stay longer and spend more.

Europeans famously have generous vacation time at work.

"They all have at least four weeks, some of them have six weeks' vacation," Hoffmann said. "Not only do they travel, they get out of Dodge, and they go to a destination that guarantees them good weather. Obviously, Arizona's a great first choice."

Miller said international visitors don't often sit still, either.

"They're here to experience the American Southwest, so they will oftentimes participate in more activities," he said. "They'll go horseback riding, they'll take a balloon ride, they'll go on a Jeep tour. They'll go to movies. They'll see a show."

Foreign travelers spend an average of about \$4,500 a person, about four times as much as the average domestic traveler, according to the U.S. Travel Association.